

A Study of Male Victims of Domestic Violence

**Commissioned by AMEN
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This project is being supported by Area Development Management Ltd. and the Combat Poverty Agency through the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.



Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the proposed feasibility study on male victims of domestic violence were as follows.

The study will: -

- Be carried out in County Monaghan.

The reasons for choosing County Monaghan are: -

1. It has a reasonably representative population mix in terms of urban/rural living, gender, age profile, socio-economic categories etc.
 2. AMEN already has a very active branch in Monaghan which will be of assistance in getting the study off the ground
 3. Monaghan is convenient to AMEN headquarters in Navan.
- Look at what support systems, if any, are in place to assist male victims of domestic abuse.
 - Seek to get as much information as possible about the nature of the problem.
 - Examine whether any particular group of men (e.g. socio-economic, age group, educational background, urban, rural) is more likely to be affected by domestic violence.

The study will be conducted through questionnaires, meetings with voluntary groups, statutory bodies and health care professionals.

The survey will seek to ascertain the views of the men on the type of support systems which should be put in place to deal with male victims of domestic abuse.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

A considerable amount of research has been carried out on the issue of women as victims of domestic violence. However, a huge void exists in Ireland with regard to information on violence perpetrated by women on their male partners. The fact that men can be victims of domestic violence is slowly being acknowledged. Amen, through its contacts, recognised that men who are being abused by women in their relationships nearly always find they cannot access the services they need to receive support and advice. Consequently Amen decided to commission this study to identify the nature of the problem and the services required to address the problems.

The overall aims of this small study have been to;

- Explore the nature of violence perpetrated by women against men.
- Examine the experiences of male victims of domestic violence.
 - Gain some insight into men's experiences when they have attempted to address their situations.
 - Look at the responses of the statutory systems (legal, Gardai and social services) to men who have disclosed that they are being abused.
 - Ascertain the types of support systems that should be put in place.

METHODOLOGY

All of the respondents come from the Monaghan area and were made aware of the survey in several ways. Notices were placed in several local newspapers, in the North Eastern Region, requesting male victims of domestic violence to volunteer to fill the questionnaire. Local radio stations were also used to make men aware that the survey was being carried out. Finally, the men were also informed by means of a series of public meetings held in the local area, an information day and by word of mouth. Due to the resources available the survey was limited to 40 respondents.

The questionnaires were completed in a structured interview format. The design of the questionnaire and the way it was completed means that the information obtained is of a qualitative and quantitative nature. The quantitative information indicates the extent of the abuse experienced by the men. The qualitative information gives a clear insight into the nature of the abuse and the men's experiences following disclosure to the statutory systems.

Because of the nature of some of the questions, the results may not add up to 100% e.g. questions that have multiple answers and questions that were only partially answered.

PROFILE

The first section of the survey focused on some of the characteristics of the 40 respondents. For example, 77% of the men are between 5 and a half to 6ft tall, while the remainder were over 6ft, and 85% described themselves as being physically strong while 55% said they were quite confident before the relationship began. With 85% achieving secondary and third level educational qualifications and 52% being a mixture of self-employed, skilled and professional workers. The findings also indicated that male victims of domestic abuse come from a variety of social backgrounds.

TYPES OF ABUSE

The findings give some insight into the suffering inflicted by female perpetrators of domestic violence on their male partners. For example, 100% of the men experienced some form of mental abuse, whilst 72% of the respondents have experienced some form of physical assault.

Physical abuse by female perpetrators takes many forms. While 55% of the respondents had been hit with heavy objects, 57% had personal and other property damaged in the home. Other findings include 15% have been stabbed while 22% have been threatened with being killed. In fact, one man said that he had a loaded gun pointed at him and the trigger was pulled -- luckily, unknown to the female perpetrator, he had deliberately disabled the gun. Another man had a car driven at him at high speed and several others said they had been threatened with being killed in their sleep. Some slept in barricaded and locked rooms, others in cars, park benches and sheds.

Hammers, knives, electric irons, ashtrays, scissors and screwdrivers were all cited by the men as weapons used by their partners. These left the male victims with scratches and bruises (65%) bleeding (40%) and 22% were left with lasting scars.

The immediate reaction of the respondents reinforces the findings of their non-violent profile. While 77% of them said they walked away from violent episodes, 65% said they actually had to leave their homes during these episodes. While most said they never used violence, 15% said they had pushed their partners away from them. Most commented, however, that they did not use violence in response to their partner's violent outbursts.

Mental abuse seems to be the most prevalent form of abuse used by female perpetrators. All of the men surveyed had experienced some form of mental abuse with 82% having unsubstantiated allegations made against them. 85% of the abusers threatened to report the male victim as the perpetrator and in many cases the threat was carried out. The economic vulnerability of male victims is also highlighted. For example, 80% were threatened with being put out of their homes while 72% were threatened with being left

with nothing. Others reported family finances being squandered recklessly and in many cases leading to severe debt, loss of property and livelihood.

IMPACT OF THE ABUSE

According to 50% of the men surveyed, mental abuse was the most damaging and the effects were longer lasting. Earlier it was cited that 55% of the men were quite confident before the abuse, yet 82% stated they now suffered from low self-esteem and 62% said they now suffered from depression and in some cases seriously thought of suicide. While 85% stated they were physically strong before the abuse, 77% now suffered from insomnia and 62% said they had lost their appetite. Other comments from the men surveyed included the effects of the abuse on their jobs and their relationships with their children.

IMPACT OF ABUSE ON CHILDREN

All the respondents said they had children. Many of them stated that their children had also been abused by their partners. The type of abuse the men had experienced seemed to have been replicated with their children. For example, 82% said their children suffered mental abuse while 50% said their children had suffered physical abuse. Despite 50% of the respondents reporting their concerns for their children to the relevant agencies, 90% of their partners were still awarded custody of the children. The men also reported that their children had experienced severe anxiety, sleeplessness, bed-wetting and problems relating to school. With 85% of men experiencing access problems, there are serious concerns for the men regarding their relationships with their children and being alienated from them.

DISCLOSING THE ABUSE

In terms of disclosing the abusive situation the men did not report particularly positive experiences. Of the 45% who had contact with the Gardai, 97% of these felt they were not taken seriously. When the 55% who did not seek help from the Gardai, were asked why not, 80% said they felt they would not be taken seriously and 77% said they feared ridicule and felt ashamed (The incidence of men reporting domestic violence to the Gardai is 11% as per the Gardai Annual report 1998). They have cited being perceived as "weak", being treated as "a joke", and "not being taken seriously" as reasons for not even attempting to contact services which might have been supportive in their dilemma.

REASONS FOR NOT LEAVING

The respondents gave a variety of reasons when asked why they did not leave. For example, 70% said they feared for the safety of their children while 60% feared they would lose contact with their children. While 60% said they had nowhere to go and that they had financial reasons for not leaving, another 27% said they did not realise they were being abused at the time.

CONTINUING ABUSE

While 85% of the respondents now live apart from their abusive partners, 90% stated they were still being abused. The abuse, they said, is now being perpetrated through their children and through the legal system. This is highlighted by the fact that 85% of the respondents experience serious problems with access to their children and find it impossible to have their situations taken seriously in the courts.

DESIRED CHANGES

In commenting on changes they would like to see take place, the men were almost unanimous in saying they want society as a whole to become aware of the reality of the male victim and to take this issue seriously. They also stated that they need appropriate support services, including sheltered accommodation for themselves and their children when they need to leave particularly violent incidents. The men also want personnel in the Gardai, legal system, state and social services to receive, gender sensitive training in the area of domestic violence. Finally, they want the issue of unsubstantiated allegations and what they describe as the ease with which barring orders are obtained addressed by the government. The men surveyed feel strongly that female perpetrators of domestic violence too easily obtain barring orders and are never penalised when allegations they make are proven to be mischievous, vindictive and malevolent.

SURVEY STATISTICS

This survey was divided into nine sections:

Section 1: Profile of a Male Victim of Domestic Abuse

Section 2: Details of the Abuse

Section 3: Your Response to Her Violence

Section 4: Effects of the Abuse

Section 5: Children

Section 6: Reporting the Abuse

Section 7: Coping with the Abuse

Section 8: Partners Details (The Abuser)

Section 9: The Way Forward

SECTION 1: PROFILE OF A MALE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC ABUSE.

Age Profile:

65% were between 41-50 years old.
35% were between 31-40 years old.

Height Profile:

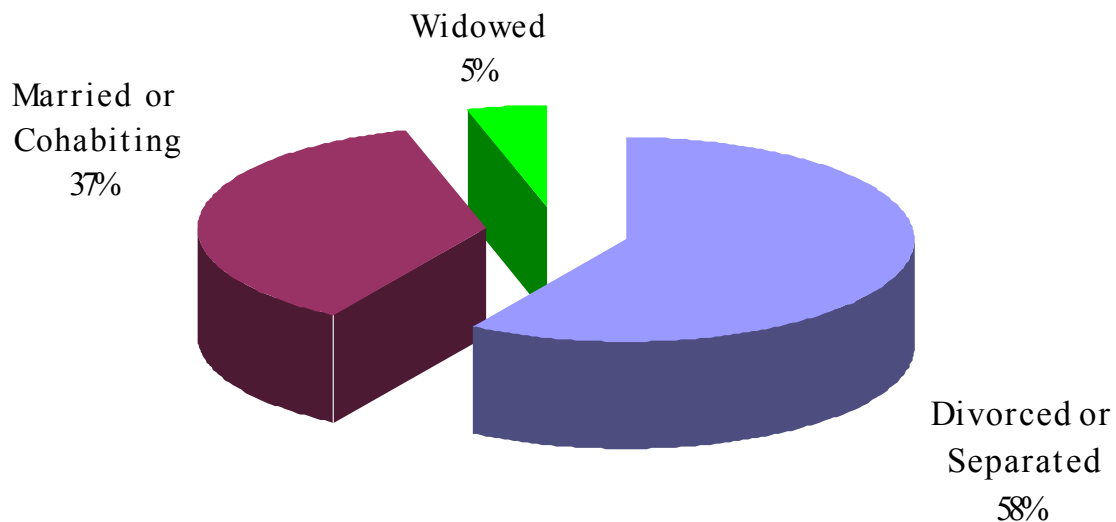
77% were between 5ft 6 inches to 6 ft.
23% were between 6ft and 6ft 6 inches.

Description of self:

(Respondents had a choice of multiple answers and could choose more than one answer.)

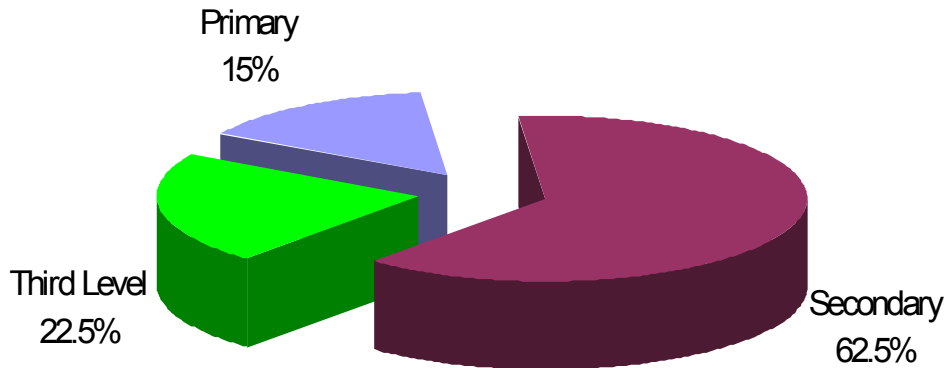
35% of the men surveyed were very confident.
55% of the men surveyed were quite confident.
85% of the men surveyed were physically strong.
55% of the men surveyed rarely lost their temper.
60% of the men surveyed were totally non-violent.

Marital Status

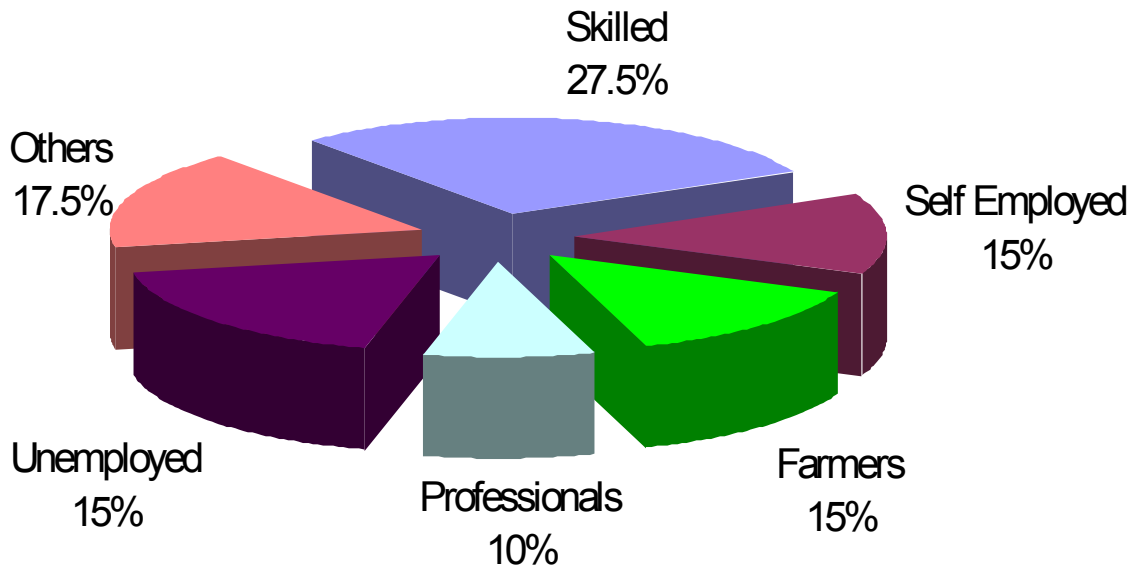


SECTION 1: PROFILE OF A MALE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC ABUSE.

Education of Men Surveyed



Employment Profile of men surveyed



SECTION 2: DETAILS OF THE ABUSE.

When did the relationship begin?

17% of survey stated relationship started 21-25 years ago.

60% of survey stated relationship started 11-20 years ago.

23% of survey stated relationship started less than 11 years ago.

When did the relationship end?

55% of survey stated relationship ended 5 (or more) years ago.

18% of survey stated relationship ended less than 5 years ago.

27% of survey stated they were in an ongoing abusive relationship.

Which type of abuse effected you the most?

50% of survey said mental abuse effected them the most.

27% of survey stated that false allegations effected them most.

22% of survey stated the physical abuse effected them most.

NOTE: false allegations included threats from their partner of going to the authorities to say the partner herself was being abused or the children were being abused.

Where did the physical violence take place?

72% said at home, behind closed doors.

35% said in front of family or in public.

Did you ever seek medical treatment after a physical attack?

72% of survey replied NO.

27% of survey replied YES.

NOTE: Examples of any other injuries; stomach ulcers, panic attacks, headaches.

What objects, if any, did your partner use?

Responses included: a candlestick, brush, ashtray, knife, scissors, hammer, electric iron and one respondent said he was attempting to phone the guards when his wife slammed a kitchen door in his face.

Some comments respondents made:

"She tried to run me down with the car. She smashed a lamp near my head. She hit me with a shovel"

"She pulled the trigger on a loaded shotgun which, unknown to her, I had disabled"

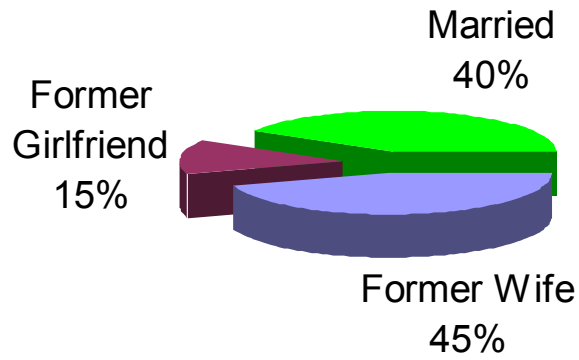
"I never knew what she would do or say next"

" She told me she would kill me in my sleep"

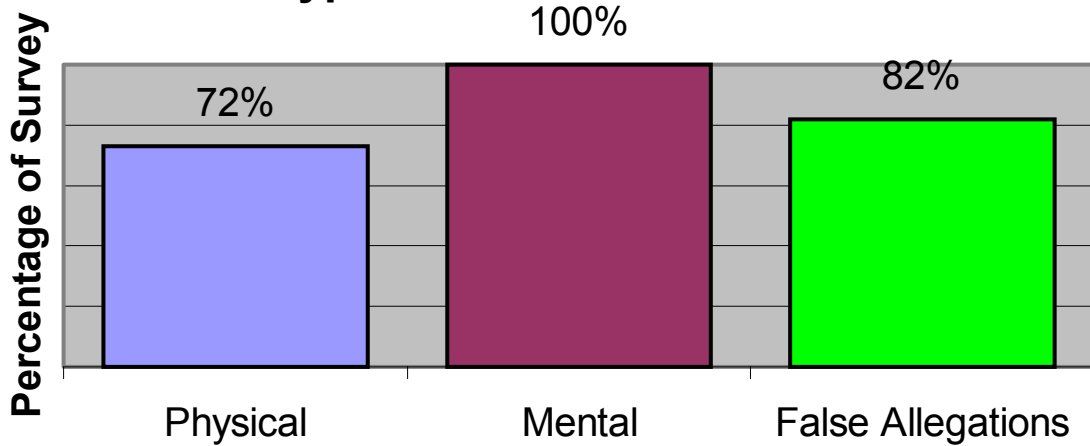
"She told me she would kill herself and our daughter if she didn't get custody of her"

SECTION 2: DETAILS OF THE ABUSE.

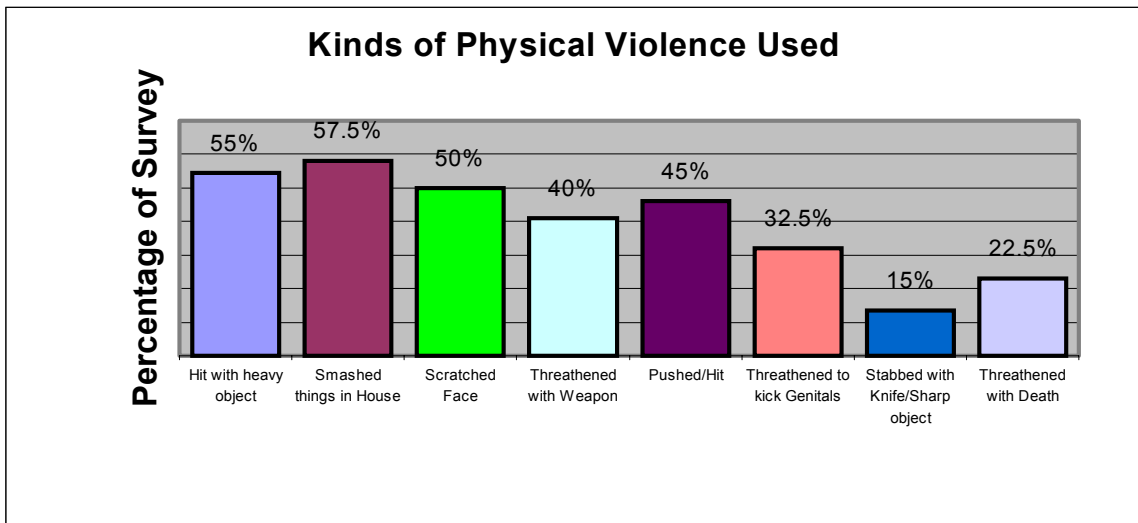
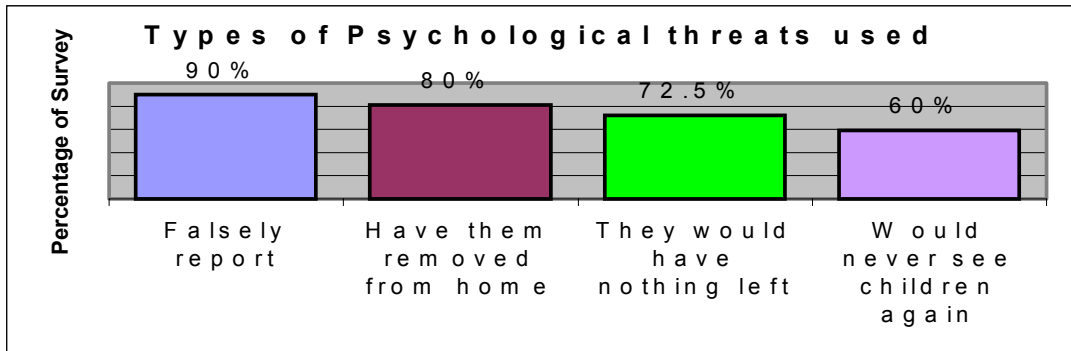
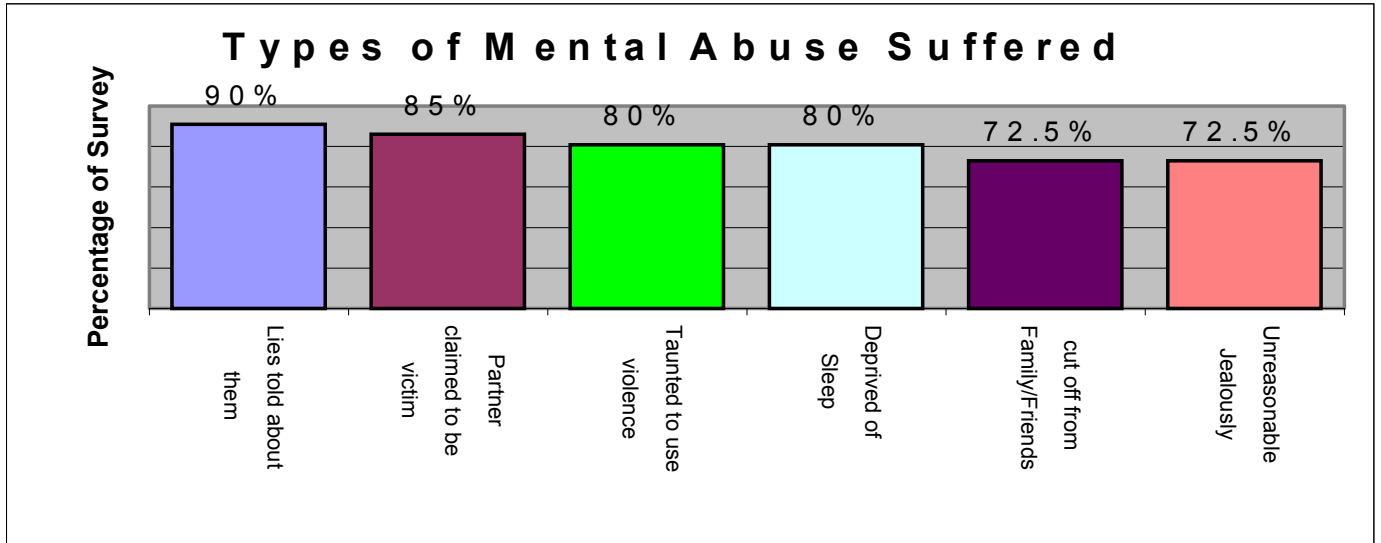
Relationship of Abuser



Types of Abuse Suffered

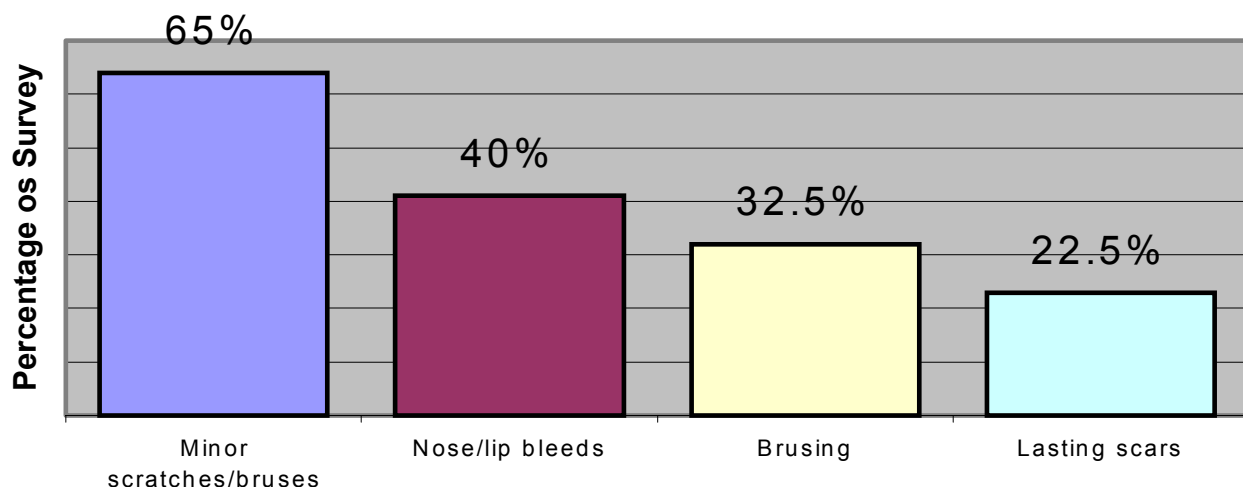


SECTION 2: DETAILS OF THE ABUSE.



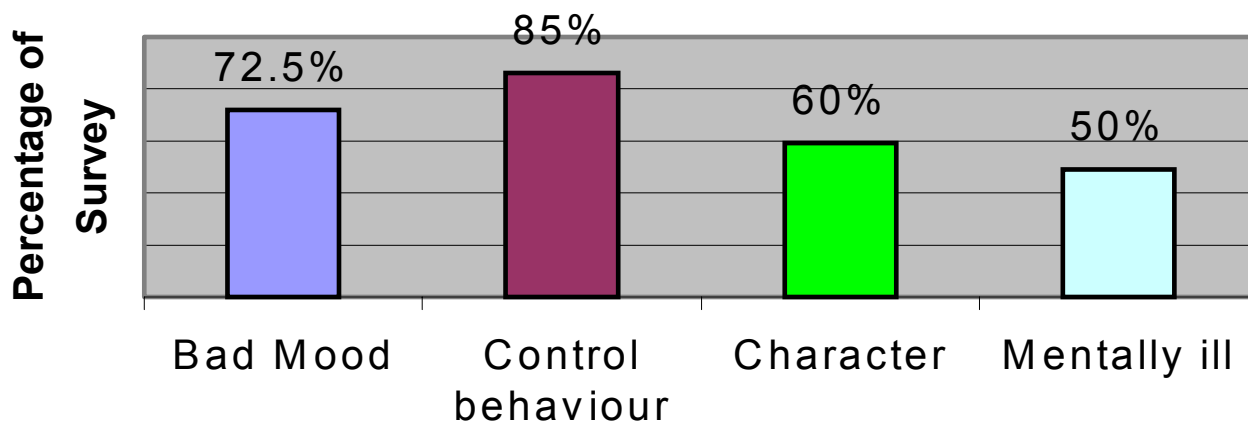
SECTION 2: DETAILS OF THE ABUSE.

Types of Physical Injuries Suffered



What kinds of Physical Injuries did you Suffer?

Why Partner was Violent



Why do you think your partner was violent?

SECTION 3: YOUR RESPONSE TO HER VIOLENCE

How did you respond to physical attacks?

77% of respondents walked away.

65% of respondents left the house.

55% of respondents tried to reason with their partner.

What types of physical force, if any, have you used against your partner?

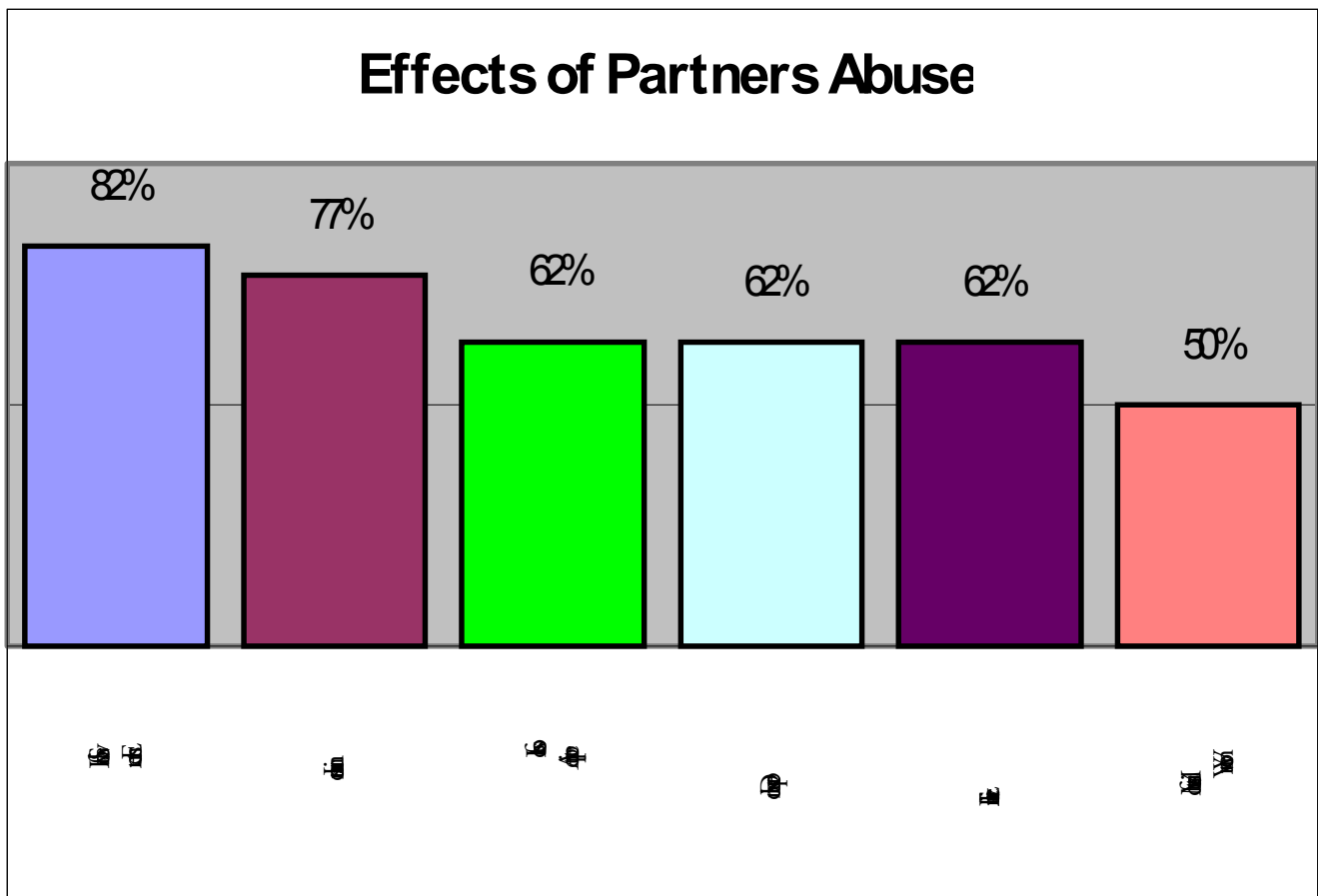
15% of respondents pushed their partner away.

15% of respondents smashed things in the house.

Many of the respondents commented that they did not use any violence.

SECTION 4: EFFECTS OF THE ABUSE

What emotional effects has your partner's abuse had on you?



NOTE: Other consequences included;

- performance in work has been effected
- loss of job
- put strain on relationship with children
- some have lost contact with their children
- many have said they have been falsely accused of abusing their children

SECTION 5: CHILDREN

All the respondents had children.

Was your partner mentally abusive to any of your children?

82% of respondents said YES

Was your partner physically abusive to any of the children?

50% of respondents said YES

Did you report your concerns to the relevant agencies?

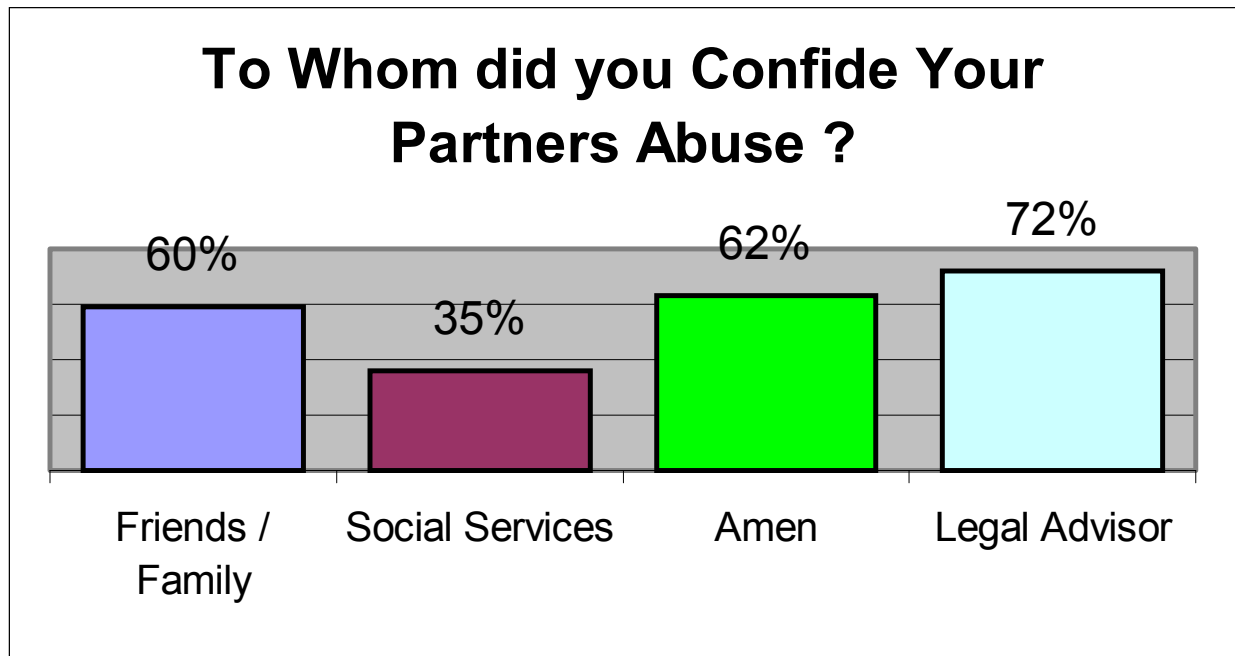
50% of respondents said YES

Please describe any effect this environment has had on the children?

Poor concentration in school, children mistrustful, disturbed sleep, bed wetting, suicidal, anxious, divided loyalties between parents, children are afraid of her, depressed.

SECTION 6: REPORTING THE ABUSE

Have you ever confided in anyone about your partner's abuse?



NOTE: Out of the 72% who sought legal advice only three men were advised to seek a safety order.

Why did you not report the abuse to the Gardai?

The 55% of the men surveyed, who did not report to the Gardai, were asked why they did not report the abuse to the Gardai;

80% of these men said Gardai do not take this issue seriously.

77% of these men also felt too ashamed to report any incidents of abuse.

What happened to those who did report to Gardai?

45% of respondents said they contacted Gardai.

97% of the respondents who had reported the incident to the Gardai said they believed they were not taken seriously.

*These respondents said the Gardai were dismissive, some respondents were told to leave the house and treated as if they were the one being violent.

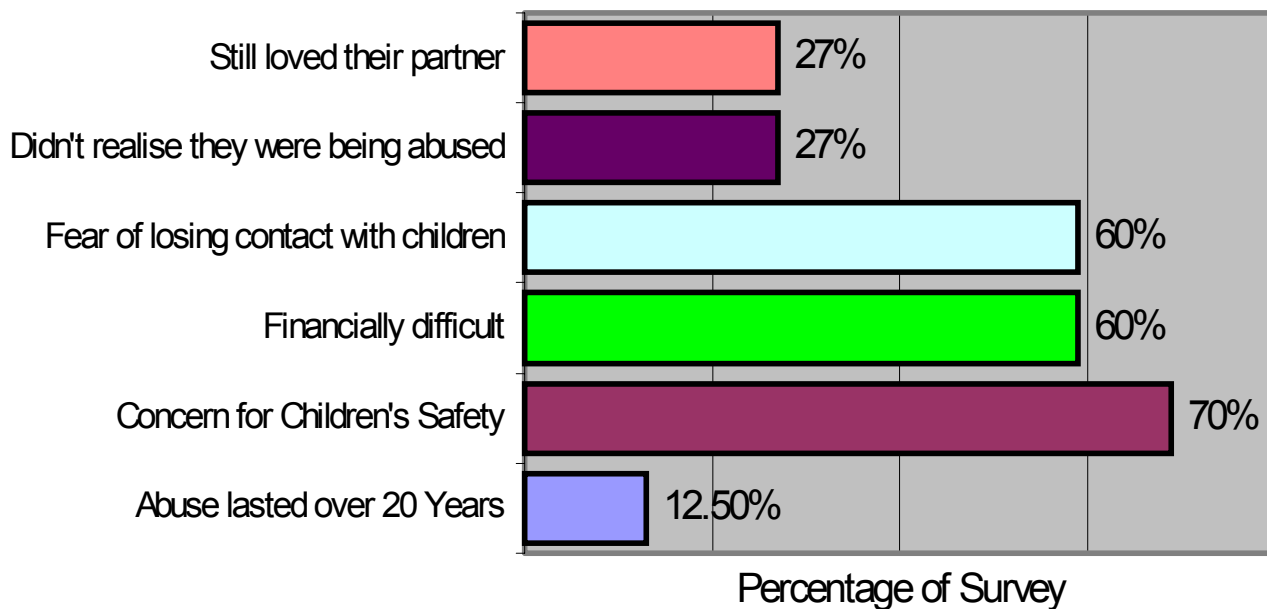
Some Comments:

‘The abuse lasted for over 15 years before reporting it to the Gardai’

‘Did not realise it was abuse’

SECTION 7: COPING WITH THE ABUSE

What Prevented You from Leaving Sooner ?



85% of the respondents now lived apart from their partner of which 90% said the abuse still continued. (i.e. through their children)

85% of those surveyed experience access problems with their children despite court access orders

(this included difficulties over telephone access, Parental Alienation and the children being used as a weapon.)

57% of the female abusers had been granted barring orders against their abused partners.

SECTION 8: PARTNER DETAILS (The Abuser)

- **17% of abusers had 3rd Level Education**
- **55% of abusers had Leaving Certificate**
- **45% of abusers were between 5ft and 5ft 6 inches**
- **82% of the survey said that they were physically stronger than their partners**
- **45% of survey said partner had a drink problem**
- **50% of survey said partner had a drug problem (i.e. prescribed drugs, sleeping, anti-depression)**
- **17% of survey said that their partner had abused another partner**
- **97% of survey said their partner did not have a criminal record.**

SECTION 9: THE WAY FORWARD

Some of the suggestions by the men surveyed:

- **Statutory services, and in particular the Health Boards, to take the problem of male victims of domestic abuse seriously.**
- **The Gardai to take male victims of domestic violence seriously and to treat the matter with more sensitivity.**
- **The legal system (i.e. legal professionals, court staff and the judiciary) to take a more balanced and equitable approach.**
- **All men surveyed felt the need for a ‘safe place’ to take themselves and their children when incidents in the home became particularly abusive.**
- **Better protection for their children if they are forced to leave the family home.**
- **The right for men to remain in the home when they are the victims. (Leaving the home has negative implications for the male in that it means he may have inadequate access to his children and that he is leaving his home which in most cases is his sole asset.)**
- **Better equality when the issue of custody and access to their children is being addressed by the courts.**
- **Less gender bias by social workers and health care professionals when dealing with male victims of domestic abuse.**
- **More alternatives to the adversarial family court system.**
- **The issue of men’s health and welfare to be taken more seriously by the Government.**
- **Adequate support services for male victims.**

NOTES